

Spring 2019
HONORS 1955H-901
HONORS FIRST YEAR SEMINAR

Thematic Title: *Game Studies*
TTh 9:30 AM – 10:45 AM
Cudahy Hall 143

Professor Gerry Canavan
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Office Hours: T/Th 8:45 AM – 9:15 AM, Th 12:30 PM – 2:00 PM, or by appointment

This course explores the burgeoning academic field of game studies. Dividing our attention between video games and more traditional board games, we will consider the social impact of games and gaming on a variety of topics from the nuclear-powered "game theory" of the Cold War arms race to utopian dreams of a life of only games to the fraught ethical and political debates that have accompanied the rise of video games as multi-billion-dollar popular entertainment. Are games addictive? Are they bad for children? Are they bad for adults? Are they a waste of time—or, to paraphrase Steven Johnson, do games turn out to actually be good for you? We will also consider pop culture treatment of games and gaming culture in film, literature, and mainstream journalism, as well as recent documentaries like *The King of Kong* and *The Ecstasy of Order*.

LEARNING GOALS

Upon the completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify, discuss, and understand various formal characteristics of games;
- Apply techniques of media analysis to games;
- Demonstrate understanding of the cultural and historical contexts in which various game and game-related cultural objects have been produced;
- Utilize the emerging interdisciplinary field of "game studies" scholarship;
- Use media study and cultural analysis to develop skills for careful reading and clear writing;
- Read and discuss games on the levels of both form and content.

REQUIRED TEXTS (available at the BookMarq on 16th Street)

Ian Bogost, *How to Do Things with Video Games*

Alexander Galloway, *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture*

Frans Märyä, *An Introduction to Game Studies*

All other readings in the course will be available via D2L.

The course will also make use of a number of other sources of games-related media, including film, television, journalism, fan practice, and, of course, video games themselves. Wherever possible we will focus on games that are available for free; some games, however, are only available for a fee through Steam.

ASSIGNMENT

Class Participation	15%
D2L Posts	15%
Thinkpiece	10%
Academic Paper	15%
Pitch	5%
Annotated Bibliography	10%
Presentation	10%
Final Project	20%

Guidelines on the major assignments (the thinkpiece, the academic paper, and the various components of the final project) will be distributed in class.

GRADING

Grades will follow the following rubric:

- * To earn a **C**, you must clearly restate the meaning or project of a text in your own terms. A C essay may volunteer an original argument, but will likely lack evidence or analysis of its sources. C essays are clearly written, though they might display some grammatical weakness.
- * To earn a **B**, you must begin to raise important questions about the text under consideration and to use those questions to drive your own interpretive agenda. A B essay typically advances an original argument and provides solid analysis of the text(s) under consideration. B essays are clear, concise, and free of grammatical errors.
- * To earn an **A**, you must construct an essay that does more than simply comment on the work of others; you must forward, counter, or transform what they have to say. An A essay advances an original argument that builds toward a climax and makes a persuasive case for its own significance. A essays are clearly written, and often eloquent.
- * A **D** means that you have not written in clear prose or that you seem to have deeply misunderstood the text. An **F** means that you did not fully or seriously engage the assignment.
- * **A-, B+, B-, C+ (and so on) grades** fall in the gaps between the above categories.

UNGRADED ASSIGNMENTS

Your D2L posts, pitch, and annotated bibliography will be graded on an extra-credit / pass / low-pass / fail basis:

- Fulfilling all the requirements of the assignment will earn you full credit;
- Failing to do so will earn you half-credit (at best) or no credit (at worst);
- Going beyond the terms of the assignment in an especially ambitious or creative way can earn you extra credit.

QUIZZES

I do not like to give reading quizzes; I think they infantilize the college-level scholar. In a class on gaming studies in particular the idea of using quizzes to discipline you seems absurd. However, if it seems to me that people are not keeping up with the reading, pop quizzes may become necessary despite my philosophical objections. You have been warned.

THAT BEING SAID

This is a course on games (which are meant to be fun!) that is itself intended to be fun. What will make this class most fun, and most useful to you as emerging scholars, is a shared dedication to diving into this experience and getting the most we can get out of it together.

FORMAT OF WRITTEN WORK

Your papers should be typed in twelve-point font, double-spaced with one-inch margins, saved in a format Microsoft Word can open. Your filename should contain *your name* in it, for example, yourlastname-finalpaper.docx.

I expect you to *edit* and *proofread* all written work, even forum comments. Drafts that contain excessive typos or grammar mistakes may be returned to the author for correction before I offer comments.

Please give your papers an original title, and include your name, assignment, and due date in a header on the first page.

All sources relied upon for the writing of your paper, including the primary text, must be appropriately cited.

PAPER SUBMISSION

Your written work will be submitted via D2L Dropbox or via the D2L forums. These papers will have variable due dates driven by your own interests and responses. **It is thus your responsibility to make sure you are properly keeping up with this portion of the course in a timely fashion.**

Except in very unusual circumstances, work will not be accepted by email.

TECHNOLOGY IS TERRIBLE: PLAN AHEAD!

The Internet goes down. Files become corrupted. Computers crash. These are predictable facts of twenty-first century life, not emergencies. For this course, for all your courses, for the rest of your career and your life in this world you need to develop work habits and strategies that take into account the basic, inescapable unreliability of computers. Start your assignments well in advance of the due date; save them often; save backup copies of essential documents, including copies off-site using a service like Carbonite, Dropbox, or Google Drive.

ATTENDANCE AND CLASS PARTICIPATION

Class discussion is an essential component of this seminar; class discussion, not lecture, will be the primary means by which we will investigate these texts together. It is crucial that you come to class every day having read the required material and prepared to discuss it. **Consequently, attendance in this class is mandatory.** You should plan on attending every class. Please talk to me (in advance if possible) if you ever find you will need to miss a class meeting.

The course adheres to Marquette University's attendance policy, which can be found on the Internet at <http://bulletin.marquette.edu/undergrad/academicregulations/#attendance>.

You are allowed **three unexcused absences** over the course of the spring semester. **After that, your class participation will drop by half a letter grade for each additional unexcused absence.** Upon the seventh unexcused absence, you may receive a WA (Withdrawn—Excessive Absences) for the semester.

Merely being present in class is insufficient for an “A” in class participation. Each student is expected to *participate in* and *contribute to* our discussions. Just being in the room is not enough.

D2L FORUMS

In addition to class participation, the other major evaluative component of this course is the forum at <http://d2l.mu.edu/>. In addition to being a place where you can find electronic copies of the syllabus and other course handouts, D2L will be a place where you can express your response to the material before class begins and where we can continue our discussions after class is over.

The D2L forums are an excellent place for people who may feel inhibited by in-class discussion to share their opinions with the class. You may choose either to begin a thread on a new topic or to respond to a thread already begun by one of your classmates.

Before class next Thursday, every student is required to upload a picture of their face to their D2L profile, and post a short, 250-word response to either *The Stanley Parable* or to the readings on games as art.

After that, students must write **four short posts** responding to **any four** texts across the remainder of the course. These posts should be completed either by noon before one of the class discussions devoted to that text or by the noon before the following class.

Additional posts beyond the requirement, and posts that respond substantively to other students' arguments, are encouraged. Up to two additional posts will count formally for extra credit.

EMAIL

Students in this class are required to check their official Marquette email account—whatever account D2L sends its emails to—at least once a day, in case there are any last-minute announcements or disruptions.

I endeavor to respond to all emails within 24 hours, usually much less—but please do not send me urgent emails regarding your assignments on the night before they are due and expect an immediate reply.

LAPTOP POLICY

In-class use of laptops, Kindles, iPads, etc. is permitted for access to electronic versions of our texts and for notetaking. However, students *must* refrain from non-class-related computer use, including email, instant messaging, Facebook, Twitter, and the like. I reserve the right to ban individual technological devices if this becomes a problem. No use of cell phones will be permitted during class time except on very rare occasions for legitimate class purposes; please turn off your ringers and put them out of sight.

CONFERENCES

All students are asked to meet with me in a short one-on-one conference at my office at least once during the semester to discuss the course and your work within it.

Please know I am very happy to meet with you individually to discuss work-in-progress in excess of this requirement, as many times as you like. Simply come to my weekly office hours, or see or email me to set up an appointment.

FLEXIBILITY

If it will benefit the class, changes may be made to the above.

WRITING CENTER

Students are strongly encouraged to make use of the Writing Center, located in Raynor Library Room 240, at any stage of the writing process. Please visit the Writing Center website at <http://www.marquette.edu/english/writingcenter/> to find out how to schedule an appointment and to access the studio's online resources.

ACCOMODATIONS

Students with disabilities who believe they may require accommodations in this course should contact me early in the semester so your learning needs can be appropriately met.

I am of course more than happy to work with you to make sure you are successful in this course and to make this course most accessible for you. However, without documentation, I am limited in what I am able to do. Therefore, in order for me to help you most effectively, I need you to be proactive in contacting Marquette University's Office of Disability Services (located on the fifth floor of the 707 Building).

ODS can be reached by phone at (414) 288-1645 or by email at ods@marquette.edu.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Students are expected to abide by the academic honesty policy outlined in your undergraduate bulletin. I urge you all to examine this material and consult me with any questions you may have about plagiarism or academic integrity *before* it becomes an issue.

Ignorance of what constitutes plagiarism is not an acceptable excuse for plagiarism. **Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade for the course.** No exceptions or special dispensations will be made.

Full details of Marquette's academic integrity policy are available on the Internet at <http://bulletin.marquette.edu/undergrad/academicregulations/#academichonestypolicy>.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM

We all enter this classroom with preexisting political, ethical, philosophical, and intellectual commitments. You are all required to engage the material—but you are absolutely *not* required to agree either with any of the writers we will discuss, or with me, in whole or in part.

RESPECT

This classroom is a community. It is crucial that we treat each other with the appropriate level of courtesy and respect. No one should be made to feel unwelcome here.

Failure to treat other students with the respect they deserve will **severely** negatively impact your class participation grade.

KEEP THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION OPEN!

I want this class to be a meaningful and valuable experience for you, both in its own terms and in service of the development of your larger college experience. If you have any ideas, suggestions, or concerns about the way things are going, my door is always open.

HOW WE WILL PLAY

As I mentioned above, this is intended to be a fun course in which we study fun things. How we get there is up to you. The games I've selected to be our initial focus are intended to illustrate particular points about how and why we play games; they also have the advantage of being widely available for free over the Internet or for a low price on the distribution network Steam. If you wish to play these games alone, that's great; if you want to meet up in groups and play together, that's also great. If you don't want to play at all, and simply want to study the games from a distance as aesthetic objects—or if a game that starts out fun becomes drudgery and you don't want to keep going—you can supplement your study in other ways by visiting wikis and fan sites, watching YouTube videos, reading or watching online play-throughs, etc. I'm open to whatever mode of engagement with these texts you like; the key thing for me is simply that you engage.

In keeping with the student-centered ambition of this course, we will build the later weeks of the class together using games you are particularly interested in studying, be they video games or board games or party games. This will be one of our collective tasks in these initial weeks.

PRELIMINARY SCHEDULE

Any changes to this schedule will be announced in class as they become necessary.

Students should come to class prepared to discuss the listed texts or chapters.

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T	Jan 14	FIRST DAY OF CLASS
Th	Jan 16	Game: <i>The Stanley Parable</i> Corey Mohler, <i>Existential Comics</i> : “Candyland and the Nature of the Absurd” Interview with Davey Wreden, Creator of <i>The Stanley Parable</i>
T	Jan 21	Game: <i>Doom</i> Roger Ebert, “Doom,” “Critics vs. Games on Doom,” “Why Did The Chicken Cross the Genders,” “Video Games Can Never Be Art” [D2L] Ian Bogost, “Art”
Th	Jan 23	Game: <i>Journey</i> Märyä, “What Is Game Studies?” and “Meaning in Games”
T	Jan 28	Game/Film: <i>Black Mirror: Bandersnatch</i> (in-class viewing)
Th	Jan 30	Alexander Galloway, <i>Gaming</i> : “Gamic Action, Four Moments” <i>Bandersnatch</i> discussion
T	Feb 5	Game: <i>Fortnite</i> or <i>Red Dead Redemption 2</i> or <i>Smash Ultimate</i> or <i>Bandersnatch</i> or <i>FIFA 19</i> or <i>Breath of the Wild</i> or... Find your own recent games-related thinkpiece on the Web and bring it in to discuss with your group.
Th	Feb 7	Stephen Johnson, <i>Everything Bad Is Good for You</i> (excerpt) Jane McGonigal, <i>Reality Is Broken</i> (excerpt)
T	Feb 12	Game: <i>Tetris</i> Ian Bogost, “Habituation” Chris Higgins, “Playing to Lose” Sam Anderson, “Just One More Game...” Film excerpts: <i>The Ectasy of Order</i> THINKPIECE DUE
Th	Feb 14	Game: <i>Candy Crush</i> , <i>League of Legends</i> , <i>Hearthstone</i> , etc. Ramin Shokrizade, “The Top F2P Monetization Tricks” June Thomas, “Sugar Coma” Julia Lepetit and Andrew Bridgman, “The Most Realistic Game Ever” Ian Bogost, “Rage Against the Machines” and <i>Cow Clicker</i>

T	Feb 19	Game: <i>Doom</i> revisited, <i>Call of Duty</i> , etc. Alexander Galloway, <i>Gaming</i> : “Origins of the First Person Shooter” and “Social Realism” Ludus Novus, “Why So Few Violent Games?”
Th	Feb 21	Stephen Kline, Nick Dyer-Witheford, and Greig de Peuter, “Designing Militarized Masculinity: Violence, Gender, and the Bias of Game Experience” Ian Bogost, “Titillation” Todd VanDerWerff, “#GamerGate: Here's why everybody in the video game world is fighting”
T	Feb 26	Game: <i>Sid Meier's Civilization</i> Alexander Galloway, “Allegories of Control”
Th	Feb 28	Game: <i>SimCity</i> Ava Kofman, “Les Simerables” Mike Sterry, “The Totalitarian Buddhist Who Beat Sim City”
T	Mar 5	film: <i>The King of Kong</i> SHORT PAPER DUE
Th	Mar 7	<i>The King of Kong</i> discussion
T	Mar 12	<i>SPRING BREAK—NO CLASS</i>
Th	Mar 14	<i>SPRING BREAK—NO CLASS</i>
T	Mar 19	Märyä, “Preparing for a Game Studies Project” INITIAL PITCH DUE
Th	Mar 21	Library Day—MEET IN RAYNOR 227
T	Mar 26	Game: <i>Braid</i> Patrick Jagoda, “Fabulously Procedural: <i>Braid</i> , Historical Processing, and the Videogame Sensorium”
Th	Mar 28	<i>CLASS CANCELLED</i> ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE
T	Apr 2	SPORTS GAMES
Th	Apr 4	E-SPORTS
T	Apr 9	BOARD GAMES / PARTY GAMES
Th	Apr 11	BOARD GAMES / PARTY GAMES
T	Apr 16	Games: molleindustria.org Alexander Galloway, <i>Gaming</i> : “Counter gaming”
Th	Apr 18	<i>EASTER BREAK—NO CLASS</i>

T	Apr 23	PRESENTATIONS
Th	Apr 25	PRESENTATIONS
T	Apr 30	PRESENTATIONS
Th	May 2	PRESENTATIONS LAST DAY OF CLASS
W	May 8	FINAL PROJECT DEADLINE

FOLLOW FAME: FRIENDS AND ALUMNI/AE OF MARQUETTE ENGLISH!

On Facebook (page): www.facebook.com/marquettefame

On Facebook (group): www.facebook.com/groups/496438583889194
(search for “Undergraduate English at Marquette”)

On Twitter: @MarquetteFAME

I will also be inviting you to events in the pop culture and pizza series I run periodically during the fall and spring semesters. I hope you can attend!

Additional Reading

Students interested in diving deeper into game studies might be interested in some of the following texts as possible starting points:

Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter, *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games*

Richard Grusin, *Remediation*

Stephen Kline, Nick Dyer-Witheford, Greif de Peuter, *Digital Play: The Interaction of Technology, Culture, and Marketing*

Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life, and Utopia*

Ralph Koster, *A Theory of Fun for Game Design*

Mark J.P. Wolf and Bernard Perron, *The Video Game Theory Reader* and *The Video Game Theory Reader 2*

Stephanie Boluk and Patrick LeMieux, *Metagaming*

There is also a growing variety of games criticism available on the web, ranging from popular writing at sites like Kotaku and Polygon, to academic journals like *Game Studies* and *Games and Culture*, to even podcasts like *Game Studies Study Buddies*. I'm very happy to give additional recommendations especially as the final project comes into focus.